Nadezhda Nadezhdina

MOTHER PUMPKIN

and Her Remarkable GOURD FAMILY

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CONTENTS

Riddle 3

The Biggest 5

What the King's Court Decided 16

What the People Said 18

What Is Squash's Family Name? 8

Caravan in the Desert 20

Who Needs Tendrils and Why? 9

The Wonder at Lake Okeechobee 10

Brother Watermelon at Home 22

Brother Watermelon in His New Home 24

How Brother Squash Showed He Belonged 12

The Invisible Sentry 26

Why Sister Melon Was Brought to Court 14

How Brother Cucumber Crossed the Border 29

Riddle

Tasty cereal, soup of gold,
Food for birds during bitter cold,
Pancakes and pastries, jam and cake,
Medicine children like to take,

Buckets and ladles, drums and jugs,
Pitchers and bottles, spoons and mugs.

Whatever, tell me, can it be?
Whatever can it be?

If you cannot guess, then here is a hint: the answer lies on the ground at the edge of the vegetable garden.

The Biggest

What lies on the ground at the edge of the vegetable garden under a green canopy of rough leaves? Mother Pumpkin!

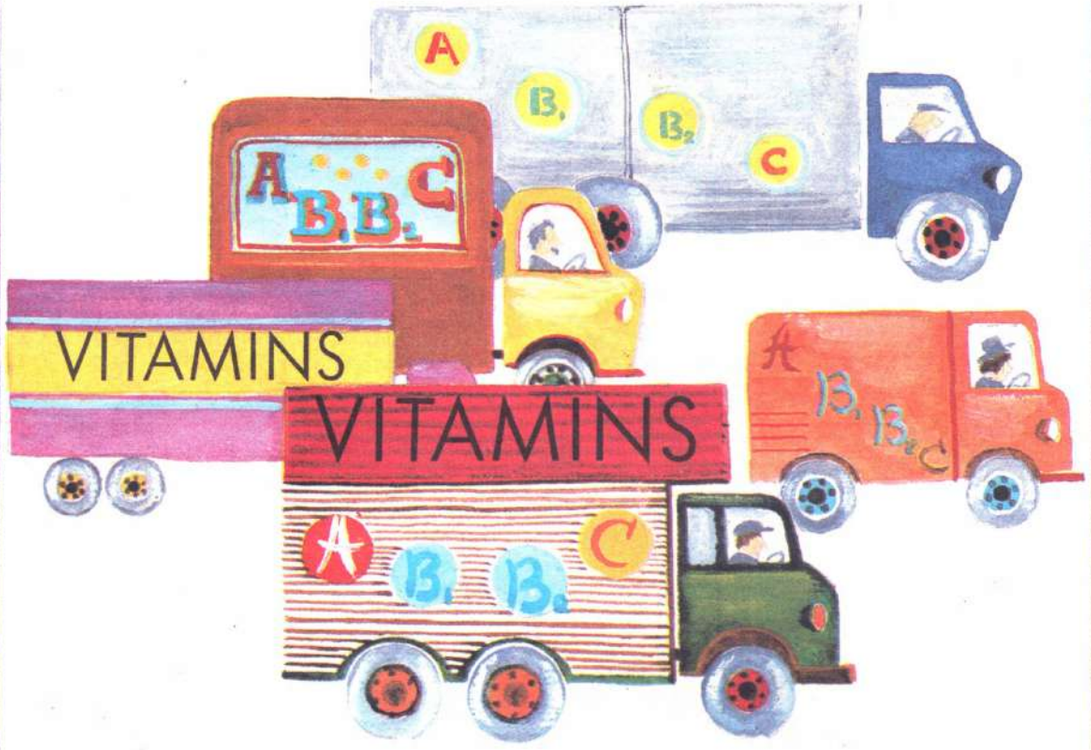
The first cereal with pumpkin was cooked by American Indians long before Columbus' ships reached the shore of the New World.

Now, Mother Pumpkin and members of her Gourd family are known the world over. Cooks

make not only cereal, but golden soup, squash patties, baked pudding, pancakes, cake, jam. Thirty different dishes.

The Indians liked the sweet pumpkin for its taste. In any pharmacy you can buy vitamin pills. On the box are the names of the vitamins. And the first one, vitamin A, comes from pumpkins. There is much carotin in their bright orange flesh. In your body carotin turns into vitamin A which helps you grow and is good for your eyes.

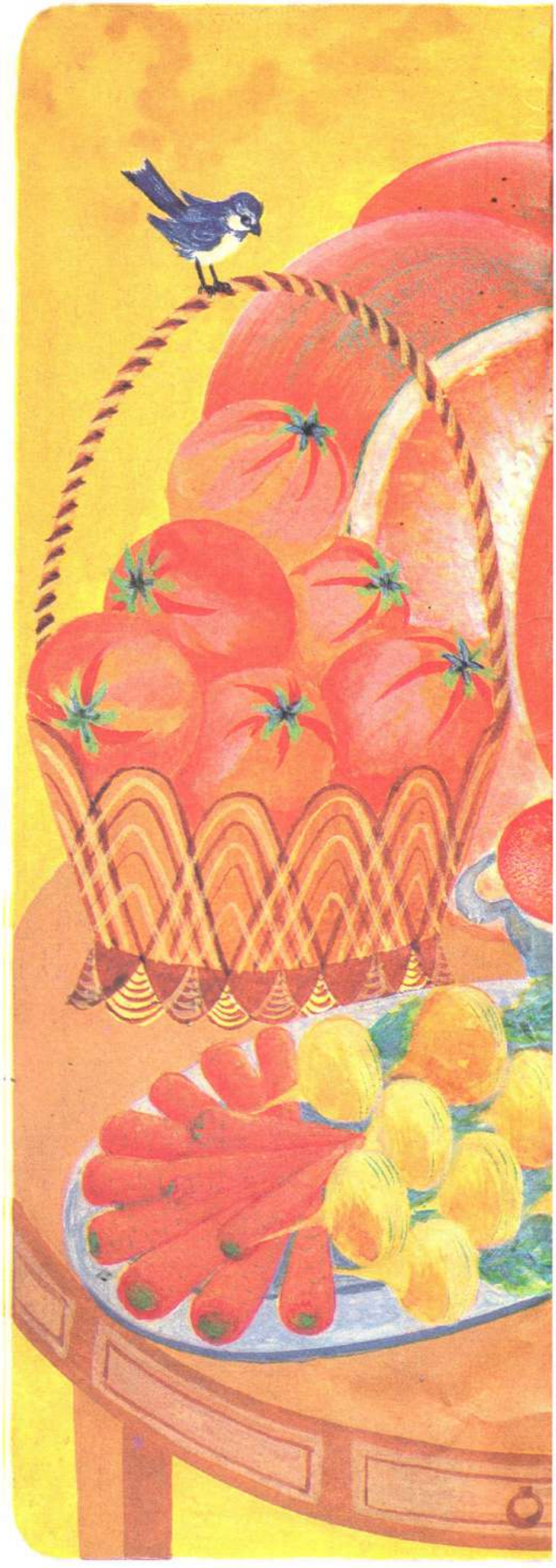
But why is it that pumpkins are used to make vitamins and not turnips, or carrots, or persimmons, or oranges? Carotin exists in

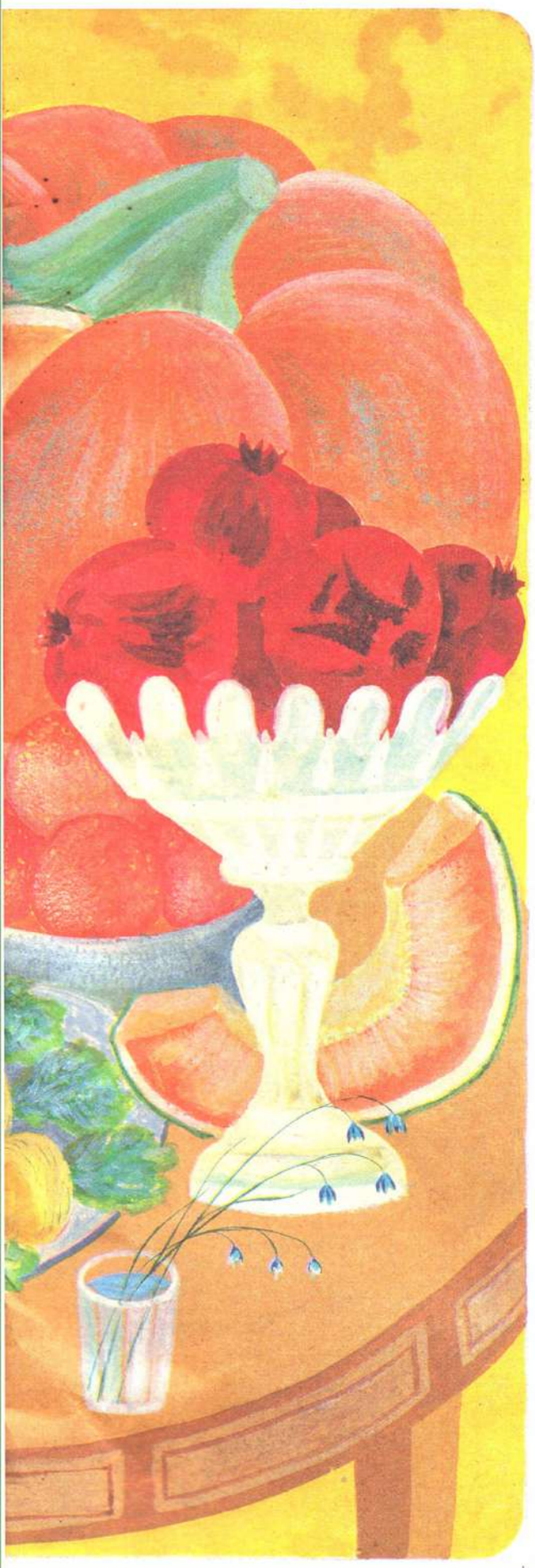


other fruits and vegetables which are orange and red in color. Pumpkins are used because it is easier to get carotin from them. They are bigger than the largest orange, the fattest turnip, and the longest carrot. In fact, they are bigger than all other fruits and vegetables.

If we sit you on one end of a seesaw and a pumpkin on the other, like on a scale, what do you think will happen? You will find out when you go flying up into the air.

The pumpkin can even weigh more than your mother. It

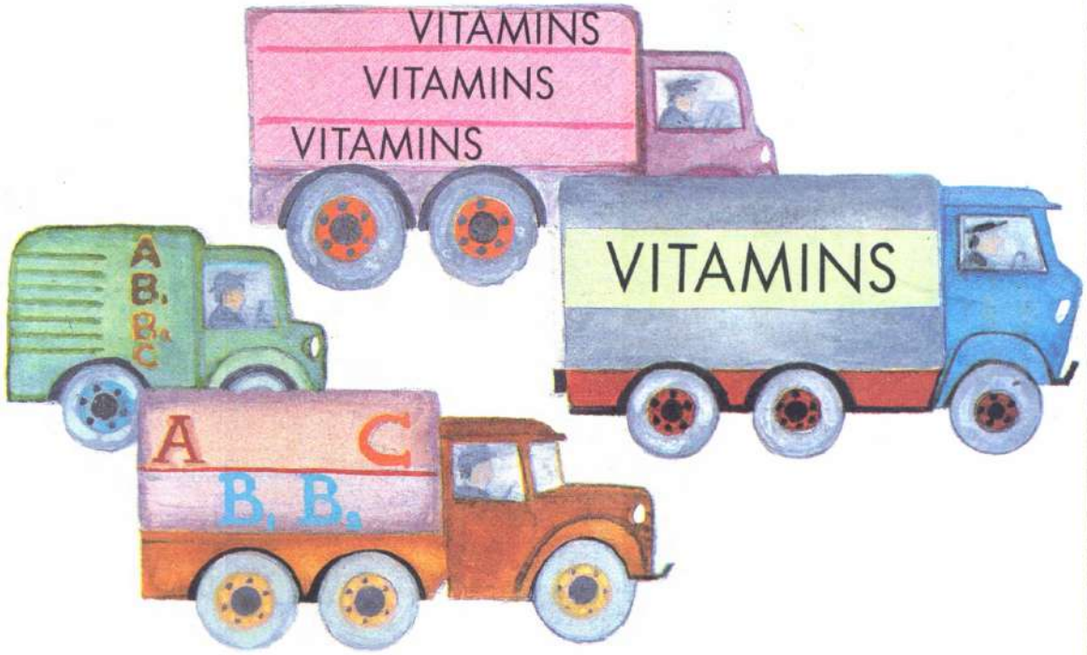




sometimes grows to sixty kilograms. Pretty big, don't you think?

Gourds are also huge. People do not eat them, but use them to make various domestic receptacles. In the Caucasus Mountains oil or wine is kept in bottle gourds. They say that pickles marinated in kettle gourds are particularly tasty.

In African villages where water is carried on people's heads, thin-necked gourds go to the well. They retain water and are lighter than any pail. At the village market bowls, ladles, flasks, and jugs are all made from gourds. In Africa people eat from gourds,



drink from gourds, and dance to the music of drums made from gourds.

Everything about the Gourd family is large, right down to the seeds. Children who live in northern countries feed them to hungry tomtits. The tomtits shell them easily, while sparrows, who usually bother the tomtits while they eat, cannot crack such large seeds.

So that is Mother Pumpkin and her Gourd family. There are no larger fruits and vegetables on earth.

What Is Squash's Family Name?

We give our name when introduced,
But what is Squash's family name?
His brother, Watermelon, has the same.
And what is Watermelon's family name?

They Are All

of

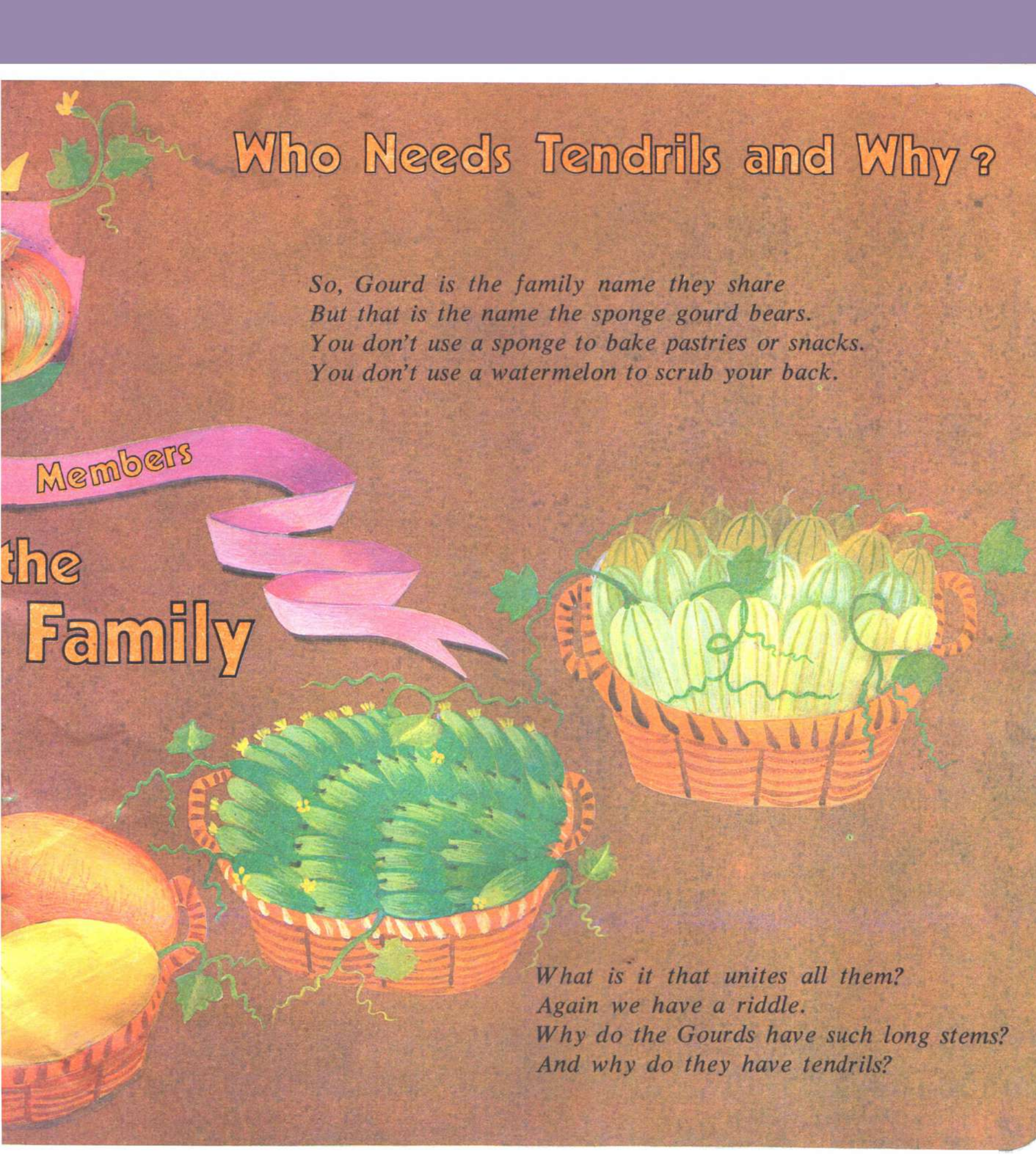
Gourd

His sister, Melon, has the same.
And what is Melon's family name?
They all with Mother Pumpkin claim,
That Gourd is their proud family's name.

Who Needs Tendrils and Why?

So, Gourd is the family name they share
But that is the name the sponge gourd bears.
You don't use a sponge to bake pastries or snacks.
You don't use a watermelon to scrub your back.

Members of the Family



What is it that unites all them?
Again we have a riddle.
Why do the Gourds have such long stems?
And why do they have tendrils?

The Wonder at Lake Okeechobee

Where did it happen? When did it happen?

In America, on the Florida Peninsula, over seventy years ago.

A man walked up to Lake Okeechobee. He had a knapsack on his back and a shovel in his hand. Was he searching for buried treasure?

No, he was a botanist, a person who knows all about plants. His name was Small.

What had brought him to Lake Okeechobee? Earlier that lake had been surrounded by impassable swamps. Birds flew there, frogs swam along the muddy surface, but a man would get stuck and be sucked into the quagmire. Recently the swamps had been drained.

Small wanted to be the first to step on the ground over which no other scientist had passed.

He walked and walked. In the woods he saw a tree. A vine wound up the trunk, like a green snake. Such plants are called lianas. Their long thin stems cannot stand alone. They need support — the strong trunk of a tree, for example.

What kind of liana did Small come across? Ivy? No, not ivy. Hop? No, not hop. A pumpkin was winding up the tree, grasping the bark with its tendrils.

That may have been the most amazing day in Small's life. It was as if he had stepped back into the distant past. He saw something wonderful. He saw Mother Pumpkin the way she had looked thousands of years ago. He saw the ancient, wild climbing pumpkin. If not for its long stem, it would have died in the grass, never seeing the sun. If not for its hooked tendrils, it would not have been able to climb up toward the light.

Today Mother Pumpkin has grown heavier, and she no longer climbs trees. The former climber has become a crawler, and the hooked tendrils have turned into anchors. The wind cannot tear the

long stem from the soil or blow it around. Those grasping tendrils, twining around mounds and pushing into cracks, firmly hold the stem to the ground.

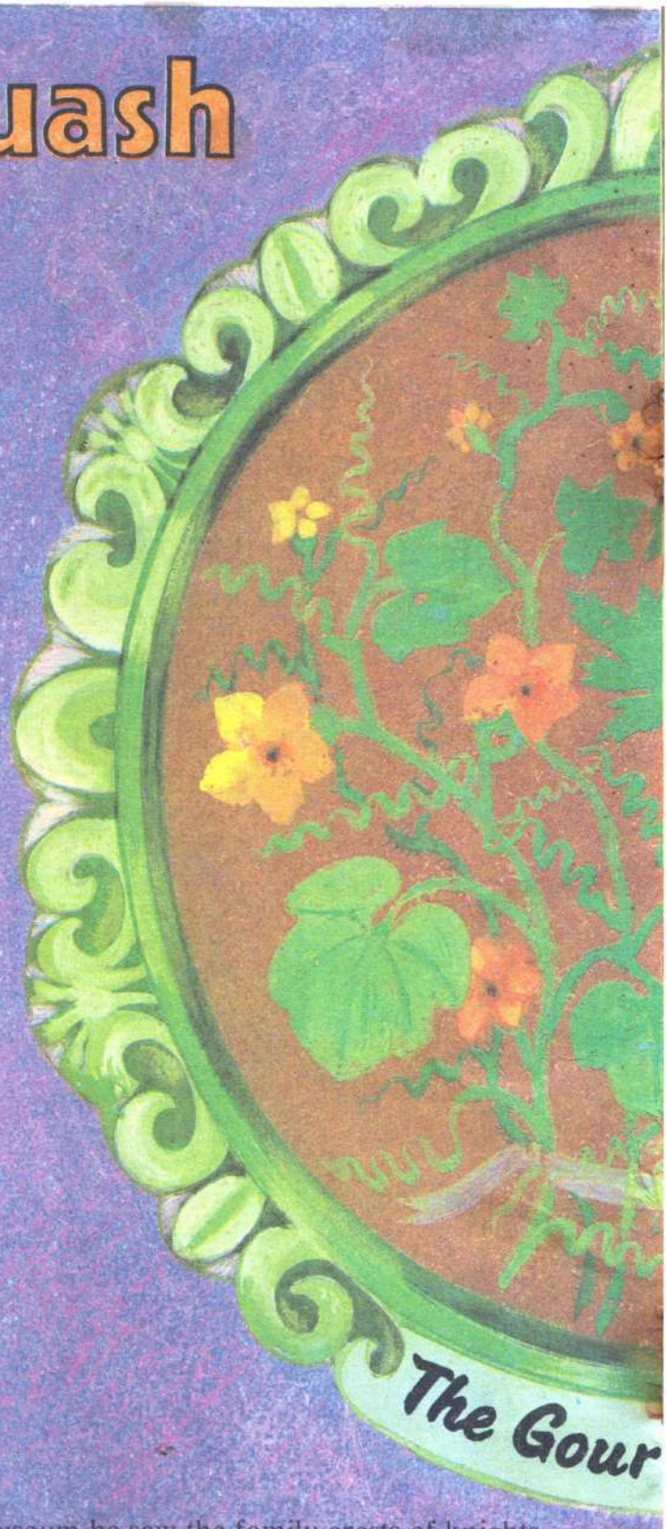
And Sister Melon is also a crawler now, as is Brother Watermelon.

But Brother Cucumber still clings to the old habit of climbing. He no longer climbs trees in the forest, but winds along wire trellises in greenhouses specially made for him by men.

Sister Sponge Gourd can climb even higher. She is the record holder among climbing members of the Gourd family. Her long fruit must hang and not touch the wire if its shape is to be right. When the rind is removed from the overripe fruit, you find a course, mesh frame.

With that rough sponge you can scrub yourself really clean!

How Brother Squash



Well, what about Brother Squash? In gardens and fields you can find different kinds of squash. Some grow on long stems and have tendrils, while others grow on bushy plants and have no stems or tendrils.

Then maybe these bush squash are not really members of the Gourd family?

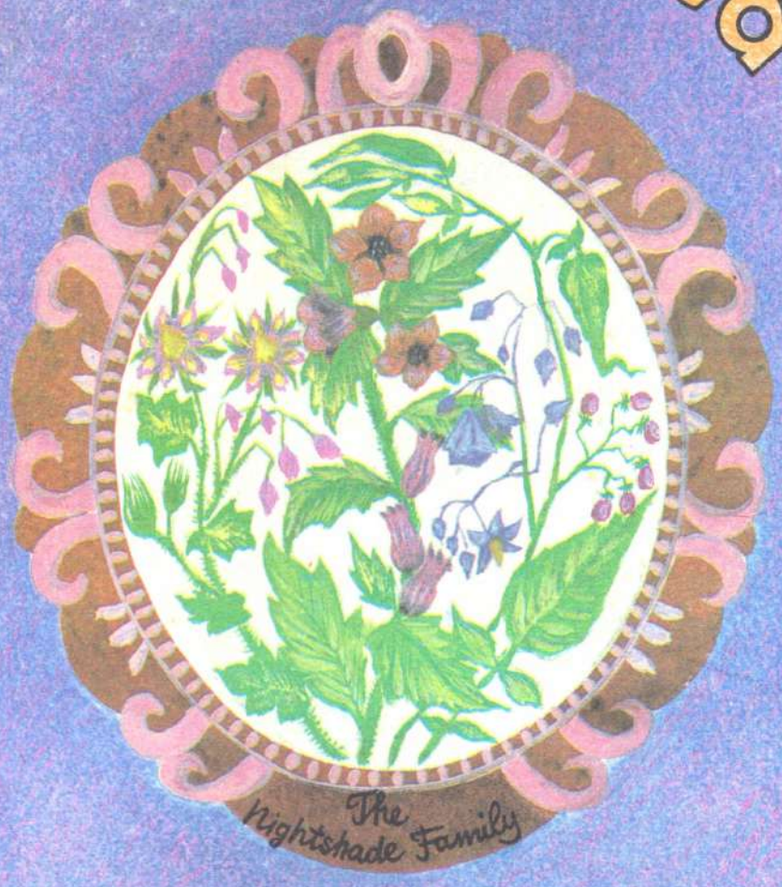
Why don't we make sure.

There is a boy in our apartment building who collects pins with the crests of different cities. He has a pin with a lion—the crest of Vladimir; another with a falcon—the crest of Suzdal; one with an aurochs—the crest of Kaunas; and many with bears.

In a museum he saw the family crests of knights. You could tell to what family the knight belonged by the crest on his armor.

A girl lives in the building across the street. She also collects crests, but live ones. They grow in

Showed He Belonged



fields, in forests and in meadows. The girl dries flowers. She has an album full of them.

One of the pages of the album contains the flowers of the turnip, the horseradish, the wintercress, and the gillyflower. These are all members of the mustard family. Their family crest is a flower with four petals in the form of a cross.

On another page is the nightshade family.

What unites weeds, and potatoes, and tomatoes in one family? The flower. The flower can show you what the leaves or stems cannot. It is the most trustworthy, most exact distinguishing feature of the family. It is its family crest.

So the flower of a squash with no tendrils and a short stem is the same shape as the flowers of the pumpkin, melon, watermelon, cucumber and sponge gourd.

Brother Squash has shown that he has the right to bear the family name of Gourd.

Why Sister Melon Was Brought to Court

FULL NAME

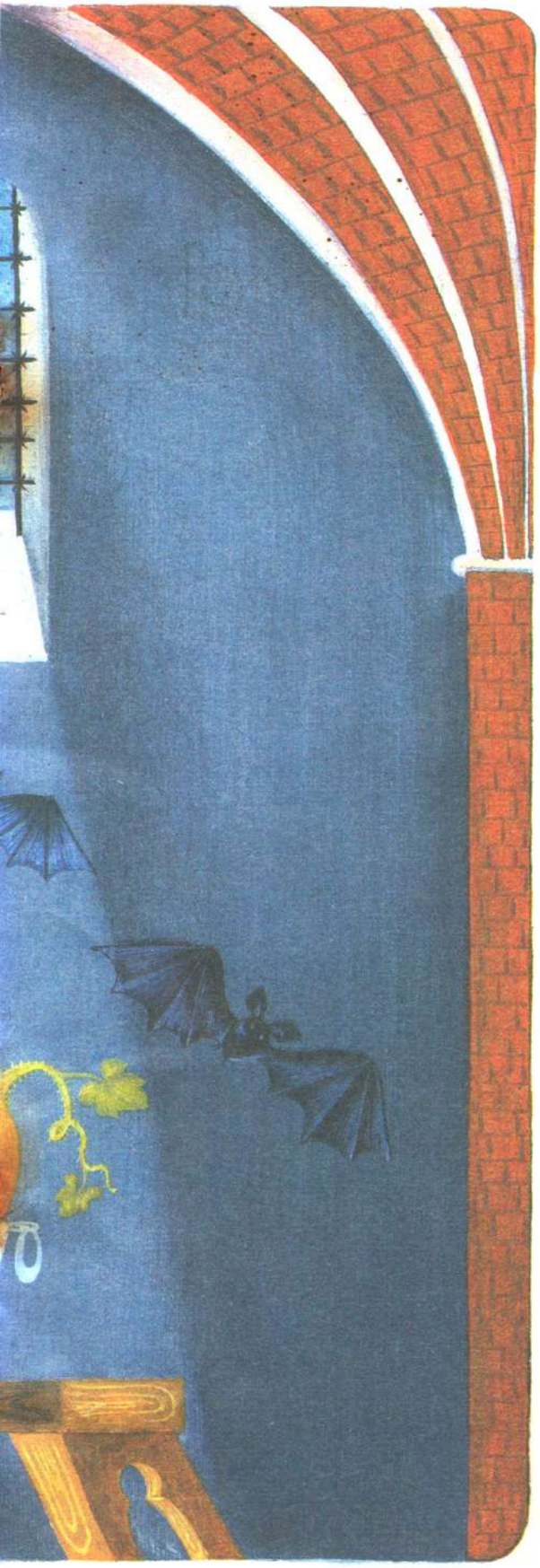
Melon, of the Gourd family

AGE

Approximately 4,000 years old

PLACE OF BIRTH

Asia



AWARDS

Gold medals received at exhibitions

CONVICTIONS

Was brought to court in Paris for insulting the king over three and a half centuries ago.

What the King's Court Decide

In those days long past, Paris was poorly lit. At dawn the lantern went out in front of the house where a man with a white feather in his hat was knocking persistently at the door.

"Who is there?" a sleepy voice was heard on the other side of the door. "The king's doctor with a complaint? Come back later. His Honor the Judge is still sleeping."

"Wake him. An attempt was made on the king's life."

The door was opened at once.

The doctor apologized to the judge for disturbing him, but explained that he himself had not slept all night. The matter was of the utmost importance to the state: His Majesty, King Henry IV had fallen ill.

"I guessed immediately that the illness had to do with something the king had eaten, and the culprit is in my hands."

"You have him in custody? Bravo! Cut off his head. What is his name?"

"Melon."

"Me... Me..." the judge began to stutter. "Did I hear you correctly? Me..."

"Melon," the doctor repeated calmly.

"Get out with your complaint! Today you lodge a complaint against a melon, tomorrow you will demand that a turnip or onion be arrested! I run a court, not a vegetable garden! We cannot cut a melon's head off because it hasn't one."

"But you do, Your Honor."

And the judge began to think. Perhaps Henry IV had eaten too much, or perhaps someone had tried to poison him. The king had powerful enemies, and it was better not to get involved with them. The doctor was suggesting that all the blame be placed on the melon. Tricky! Well, he was right, there would be less trouble that way.

The complaint was accepted. Melon was put on trial. Then the sentence was read in one of Paris' squares: the villainous melon had insulted the King of France, had endangered the health of His Majesty. Damnation and eternal disgrace to the treacherous melon!

What the P

A court is a court. But what did common people who grow melons and have known them for a long, long time have to say?

A Turk: It is senseless to talk to a deaf man about music, to a blind man about painting, and to an Englishman about the taste of melon. You cannot get the best taste from fruit grown in greenhouses. In Britain, a country of fog, melons do not grow outside. But we know the taste of melons which ripen under the bright sun and we love them.

An Afghan: Everything about the melon is wonderful. Why does a village girl meet the boy she loves holding a small, wild melon in her hand? Because its fragrance is like perfume. Those wild melons are called *dosambu* here, which means "fragrance in your hands".

An Iranian: Old men say that the melon was a gift from God, and that the cracks in its rind are

eople Said

holy letters which Allah himself wrote. It is impossible not to respect the melon, it grows here the entire year. There are early varieties and later ones. In the winter those magnificent fruits ripen in cellars.

A Turkmen: If you work in the field, take a melon with you. It is lunch for you and your family. If you are going on a trip, take a melon with you. You will quench your thirst and be full.

A Tajik: Melon is not only filling and juicy, it is also sweet. Dried melon, candied melon peel and spice cake made from melon juice, called *bekmeze*, are our children's favorite treats.

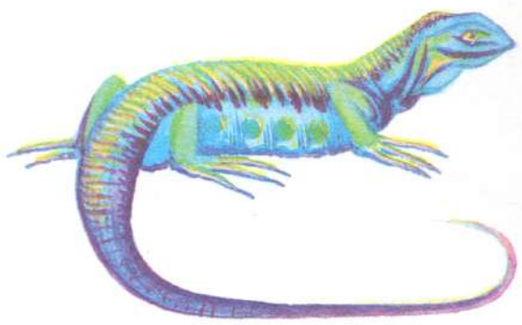
An Uzbek: Come visit us, try our melons which have received gold medals at exhibitions. With the aroma of vanilla or wild strawberries. With white, cream, green or orange pulp. I promise you will love them. No one can dislike melons.

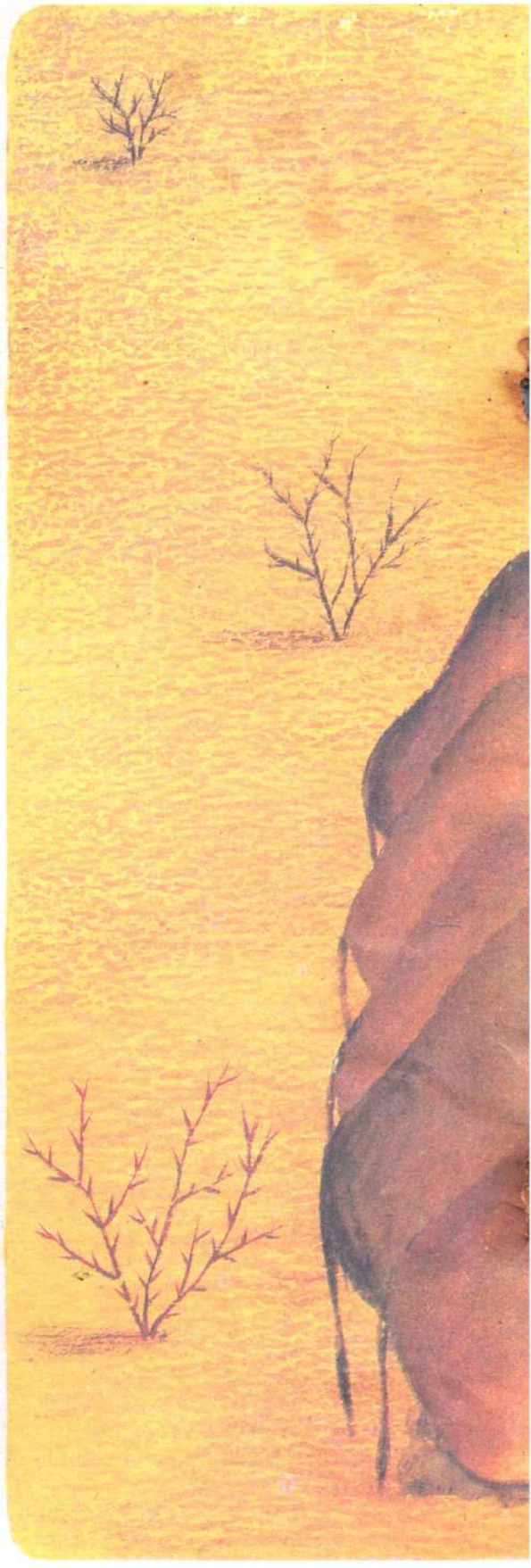
Caravan in the Desert

Tinkle! Tinkle! The little bells ring
And the camel's long steps are so proud.
From nose to nose a long rope is strung
For no wandering off is allowed.

Through sand and heat the caravan moves
And halt is the world's sweetest sound.
For there you find refreshment and rest
And such stories are passed all around.

Long is the road, many are the stories,
All about the desert and its glories.
Here is one of them.





Brother Watermelon at Home

Where is his native land? Africa, in the desert Kalahari, which is called Khofu. Khofu means terrible, and Kalahari means agonizing thirst. Anyone who has been there suffers from this.

The curious antelope was also suffering from thirst when she ran into that area. She was searching for places where the grass was thicker and the water sweeter. But in Kalahari there is no place where you can drink your fill. There is not a single river. And the antelope was about to wave goodbye to that deathly place with her tail, when her hoof caught on something green: it was the stem of Brother Watermelon.

Why did he not burn up under the cruel desert sun? His leaves look like green hands with widely-spread fingers. The sun's rays creep in the openings, not overheating the leaves.

Why did he not die of thirst? In Kalahari it sometimes does not rain for ten years. But Brother Watermelon did not wait for rain. He sent his roots deep into the earth for moisture, and it moved along his tall stem like along water pipes, reaching the fruit where it was stored.

Splitting open one of the fruits with her hoof, the antelope began to lick the juice. She liked it so much that she decided to stay in Kalahari and live there.

After her came other antelopes and zebras.

And after them the lion came to Kalahari—where there is game, there is the hunter. Meat-eating predators suffer from thirst more than other animals. But the terrible lion came out of a watermelon patch licking his chops. The watermelon had given drink even to the king of the desert: he refuses no one—not the tiny mouse or the huge elephant.

That is how animals came to live in the desert. And then people came to Kalahari. It is no accident that that tribe is called Bushmen. They do not build huts, but live in holes dug under bushes.

Once the silence of the desert was broken by unfamiliar voices. Dark-skinned people appeared carrying large bundles on their heads. The caravan was laying the first path through Kalahari. The leader of the caravan brought the elder of the Bushmen gifts.

"Give us a guide who can show us your rivers and wells. We haven't the strength to go any farther without water."

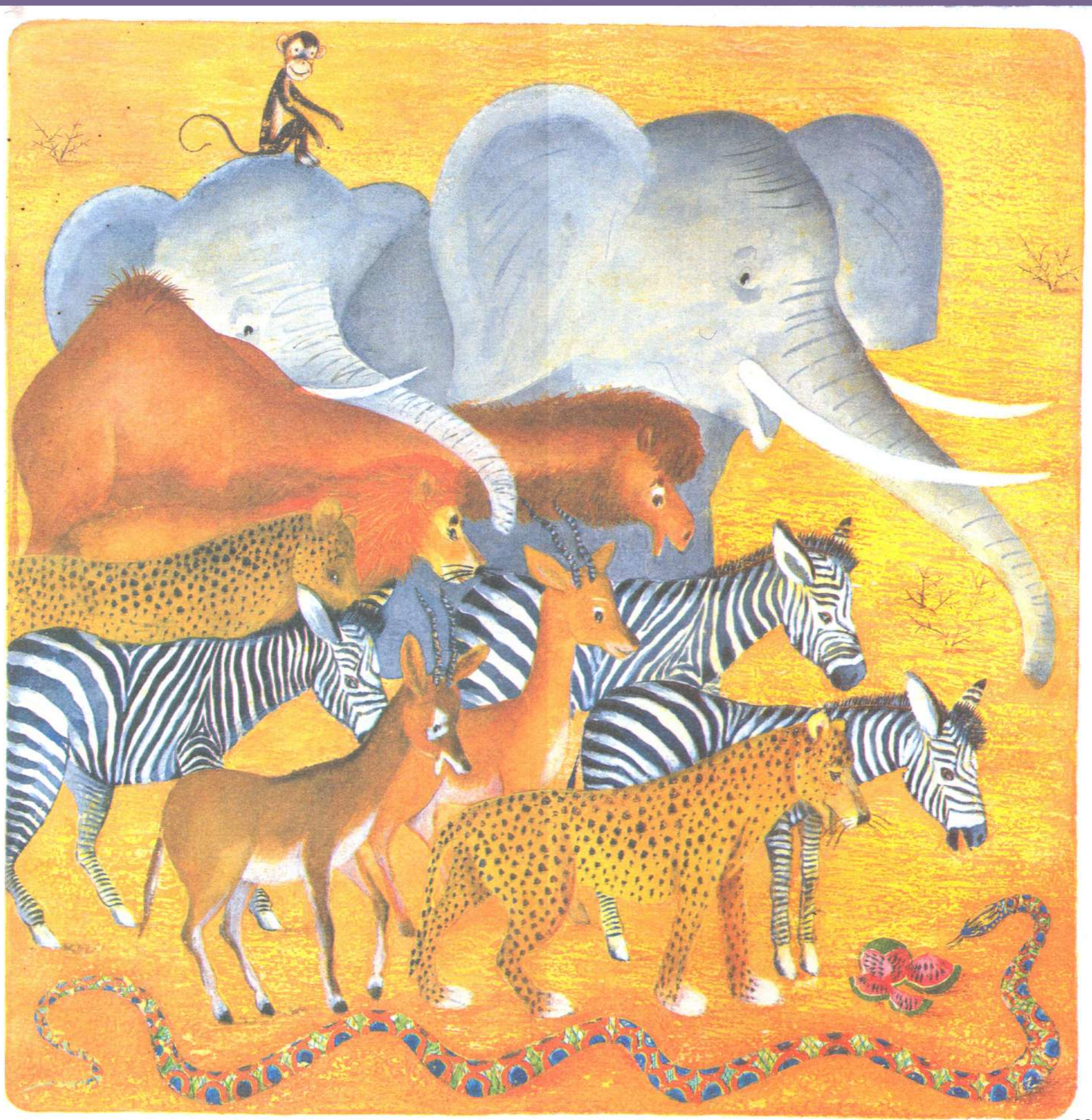
"We do not have rivers and there is little water in the wells," the old man answered. "But I will give you a guide who will provide you with drink on your journey."

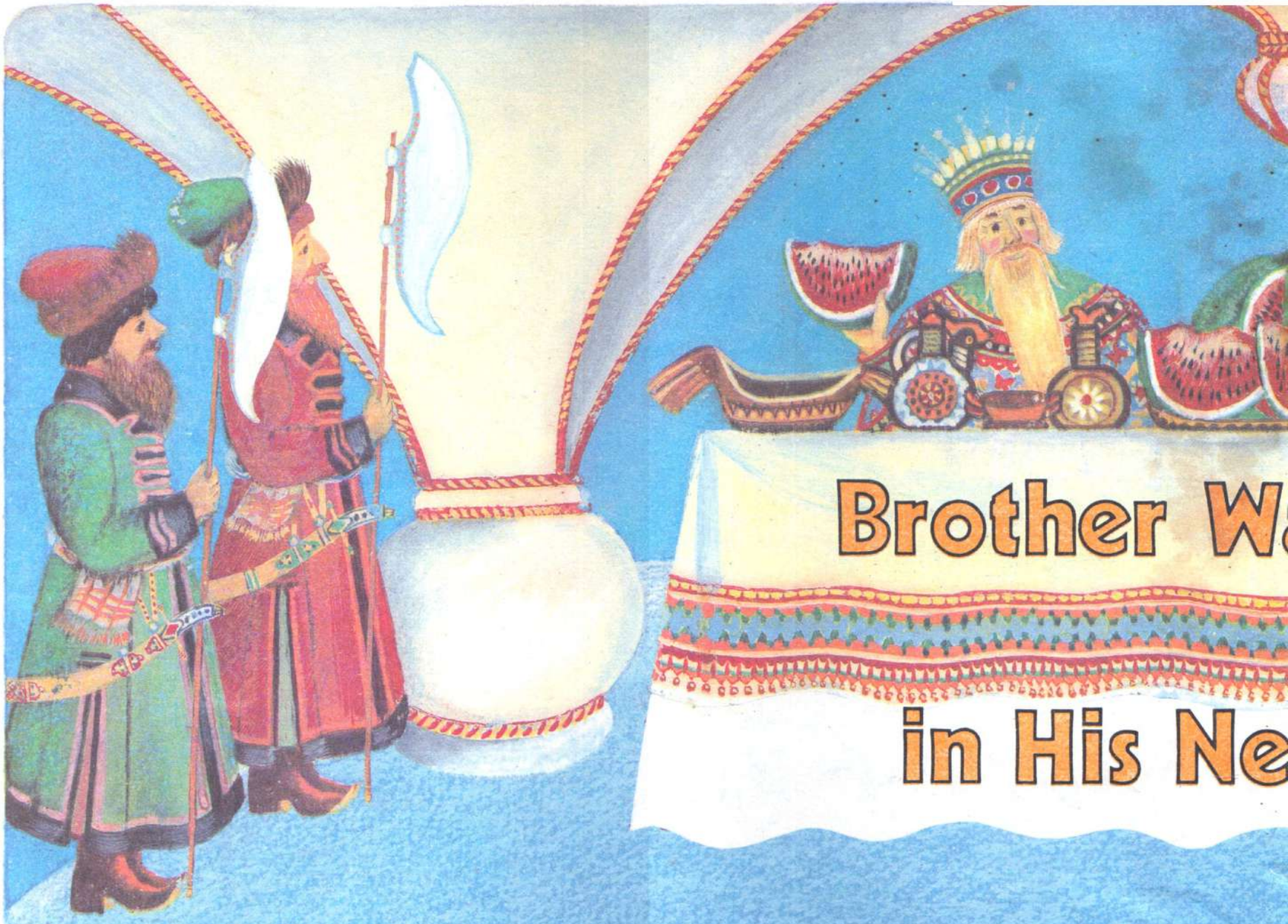
He split a striped wild watermelon with an axe and held a piece out to the leader. "Taste it." The leader took a bite and frowned. It was bitter! But the second piece of the dark green watermelon felt pleasant on his parched lips. And the third seemed sweet to the taste.

The caravan calmly continued. Along the way they came across watermelon patches, and the oval-shaped fruit was like a green flask of water for the men in the caravan.

The leader took several of those "flasks" home with him. And the rumor traveled far and wide that "agonizing thirst" Kalahari was not so terrible if you had Brother Watermelon as a guide.

Like it or not Brother Watermelon became a world traveler. And his travels took him farther and farther from home. He not only wandered through Africa, he also reached India and went with foreign merchants to countries overseas. In these new homes amazing changes took place with him.





Brother W
in His Ne

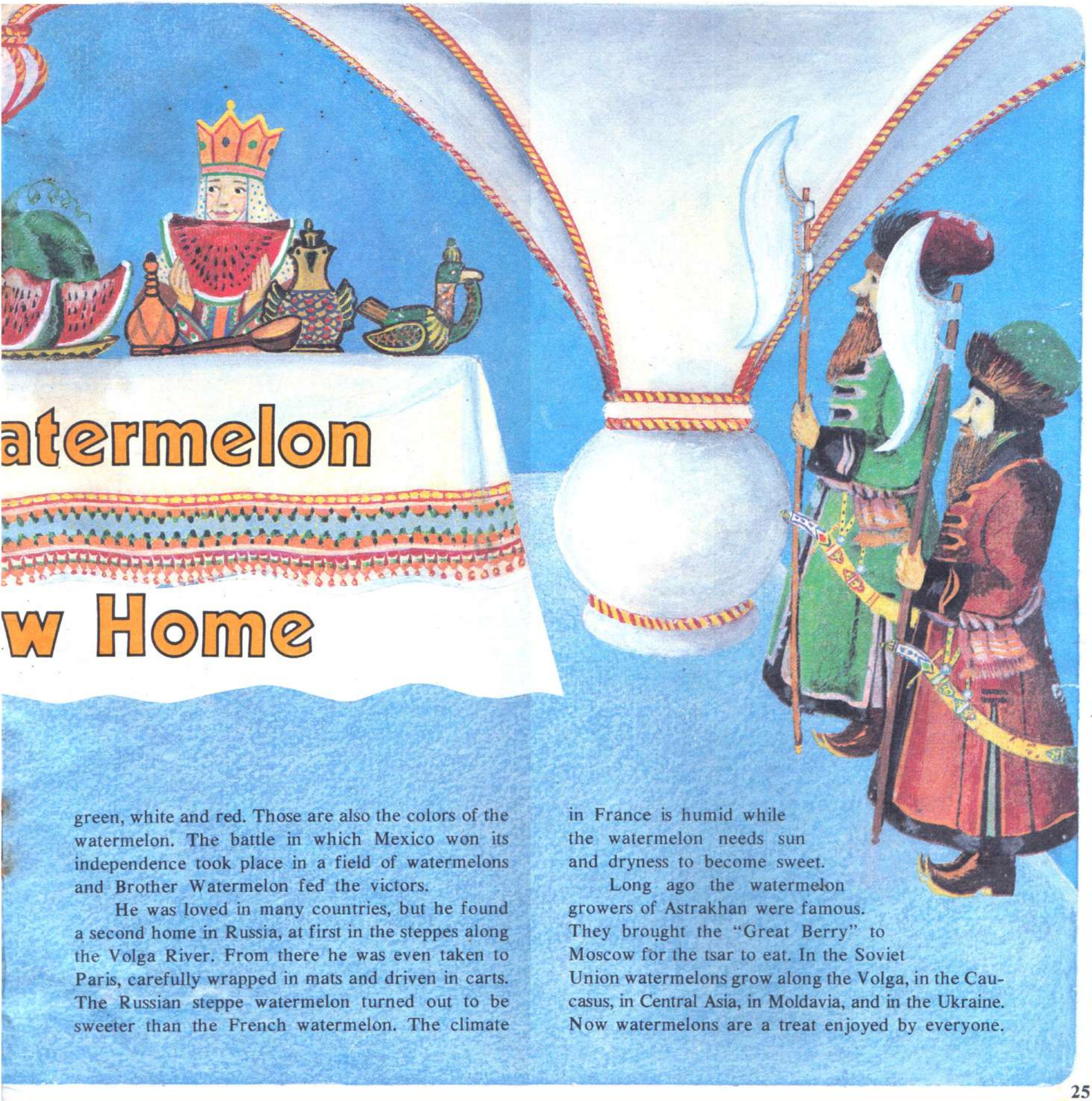
Who was it that first spread watermelon's seeds in the desert? Birds and animals. They sprouted and watermelons grew wherever they fell, with no one to care for the plants.

In his new homes Brother Watermelon began to live differently. People planted selected seeds and carefully cared for the crops. From the changes in his life, Brother Watermelon himself changed: he grew fatter, and his pale meat filled with sweet juice and turned redder.

A story can be told quickly, while doing takes a long time. In order to turn the wild plant into a cultivated one, knowledge, skill and long, patient work were needed. It took thousands of years for those changes to take place.

The larger, redder and sweeter the watermelon grew, the more people liked it.

There are three colors on the flag of Mexico:



atermelon

w Home

green, white and red. Those are also the colors of the watermelon. The battle in which Mexico won its independence took place in a field of watermelons and Brother Watermelon fed the victors.

He was loved in many countries, but he found a second home in Russia, at first in the steppes along the Volga River. From there he was even taken to Paris, carefully wrapped in mats and driven in carts. The Russian steppe watermelon turned out to be sweeter than the French watermelon. The climate in France is humid while the watermelon needs sun and dryness to become sweet.

Long ago the watermelon growers of Astrakhan were famous. They brought the "Great Berry" to Moscow for the tsar to eat. In the Soviet Union watermelons grow along the Volga, in the Caucasus, in Central Asia, in Moldavia, and in the Ukraine. Now watermelons are a treat enjoyed by everyone.

Th
Invisible

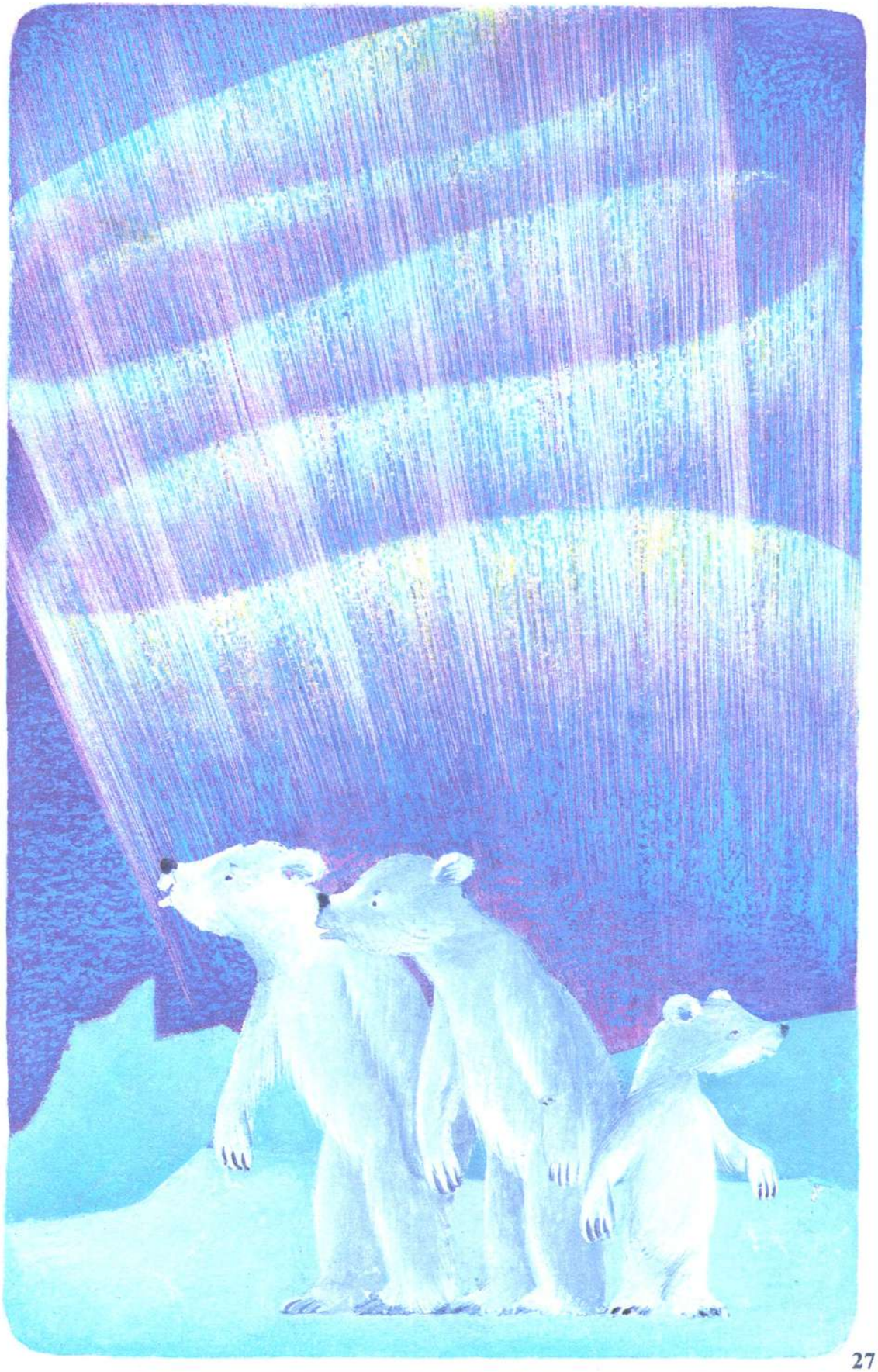
A tall striped post marks the border
And there a fine sentry stands.
But this border is invisible
And the sentry has frosty hands.

Vegetables traveling to the North
Are stopped and checked on the way.
Turnip can pass—it ripens quickly
And Cabbage was allowed to stray.

e Sentry

It does not fear the cold and frost
And behaves itself quite boldly.
But Cucumber was ordered to a halt
And an icy voice asked coldly:

"Where are you from? From India, you say?
Where are you bound? You'll freeze!
The North is no place for plants like you.
Return across the seas!"



How Brother Cucumber Crossed the Border

All wars end sometime. But in this noiseless war, fought without one shot being fired, the end is not in sight. I will tell you how it all began.

One day frost was strolling around its kingdom. The ground was still white and covered with snow when suddenly amid the white, something green appeared: sprouts under glass.

Who had dared to invite spring to come early? Who had awakened at a time when all the grass sleeps in the field and all the trees sleep in the forest? The one who had been strictly forbidden by the frost to appear in the North, and was only allowed to stay in countries with temperate climates from June through September—Brother Cucumber.

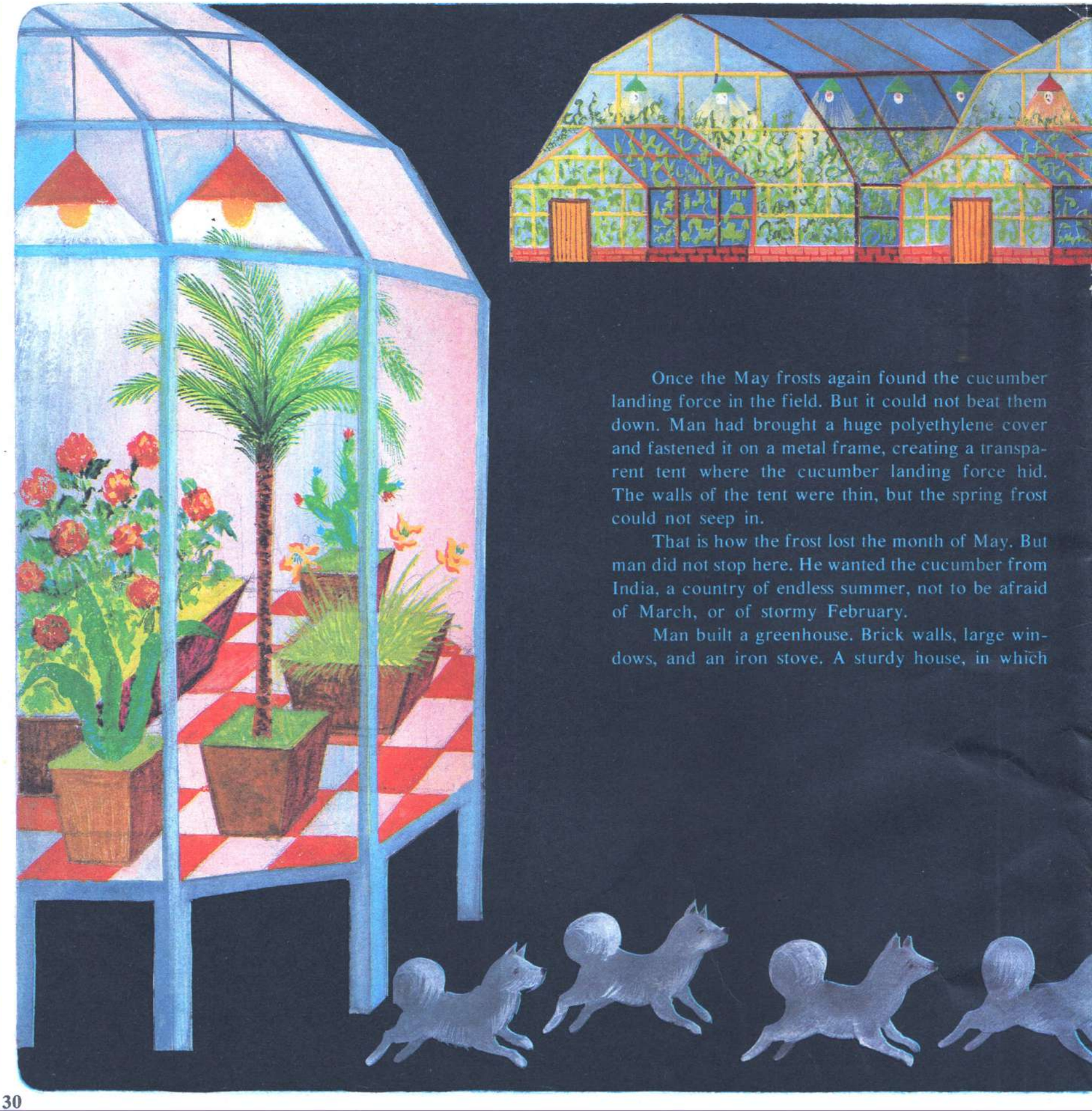
What had awakened him? The warmth of an underground heater which was not fueled by wood or coal, and which burned without a flame. Man built a frame over a hole, filled the hole with hot manure, sprinked earth on top, and planted seeds. And he lifted one side of the glass roof so it would catch more of the sun's rays.

Underneath the manure heated the ground, and the little roots were warm. But it was also light and warm for the sprouts under the transparent roof. The glass let in the sun's rays, but did not let out the warmth from the heated earth. And little cucumbers sat under glass. The frost could not get them!

But the manure burned out, and the heater cooled. The seedlings had grown and it had become crowded in the greenhouse.

A cucumber landing party disembarked in the field, in the wide open spaces. But the May frost turned up unexpectedly: "This is not India! Here I am the boss!" And the cucumbers all died, every last one.

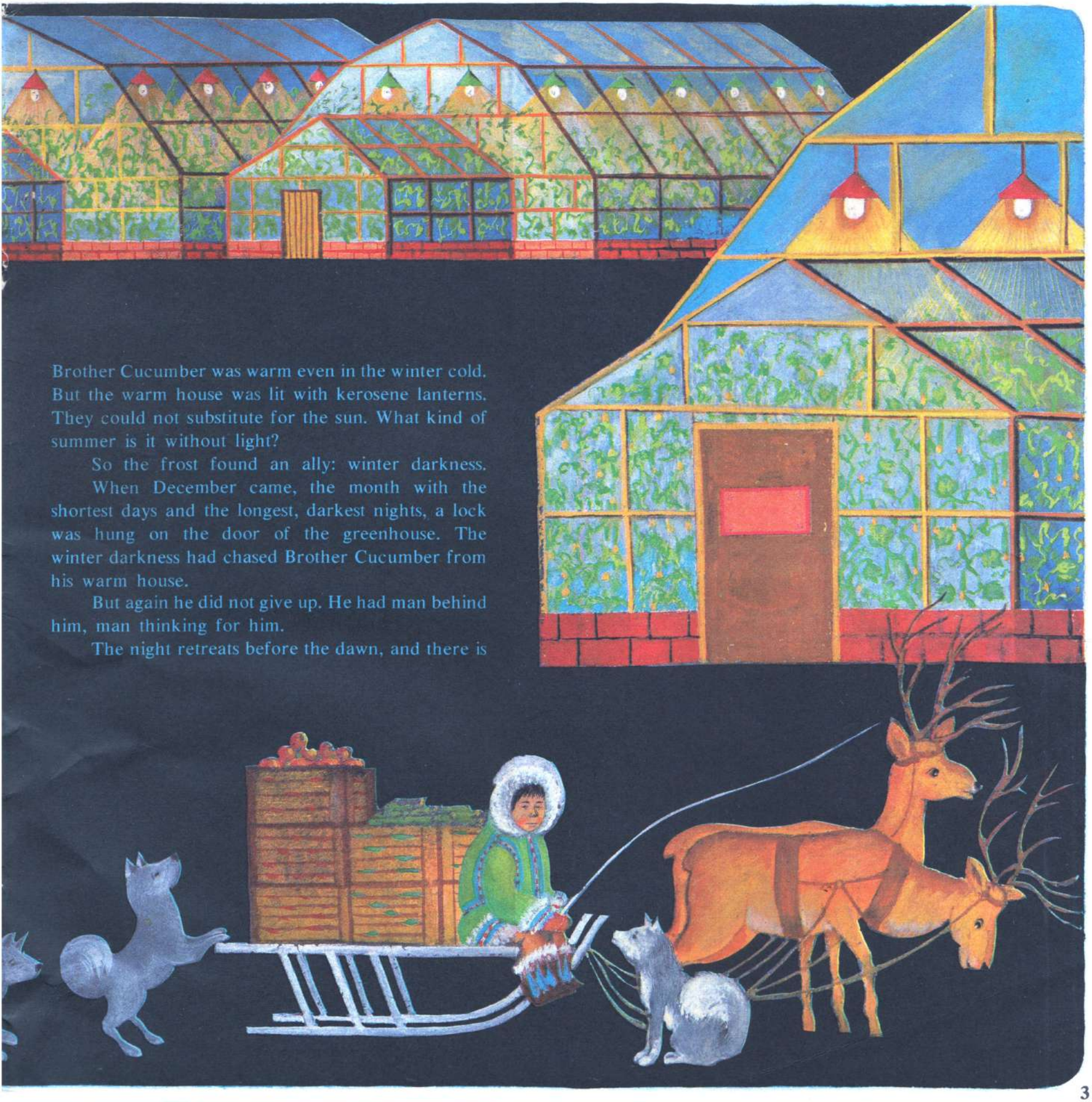
For many years the frost won the battle for the month of May. However, Brother Cucumber did not give up. Man helped him.



Once the May frosts again found the cucumber landing force in the field. But it could not beat them down. Man had brought a huge polyethylene cover and fastened it on a metal frame, creating a transparent tent where the cucumber landing force hid. The walls of the tent were thin, but the spring frost could not seep in.

That is how the frost lost the month of May. But man did not stop here. He wanted the cucumber from India, a country of endless summer, not to be afraid of March, or of stormy February.

Man built a greenhouse. Brick walls, large windows, and an iron stove. A sturdy house, in which



Brother Cucumber was warm even in the winter cold. But the warm house was lit with kerosene lanterns. They could not substitute for the sun. What kind of summer is it without light?

So the frost found an ally: winter darkness.

When December came, the month with the shortest days and the longest, darkest nights, a lock was hung on the door of the greenhouse. The winter darkness had chased Brother Cucumber from his warm house.

But again he did not give up. He had man behind him, man thinking for him.

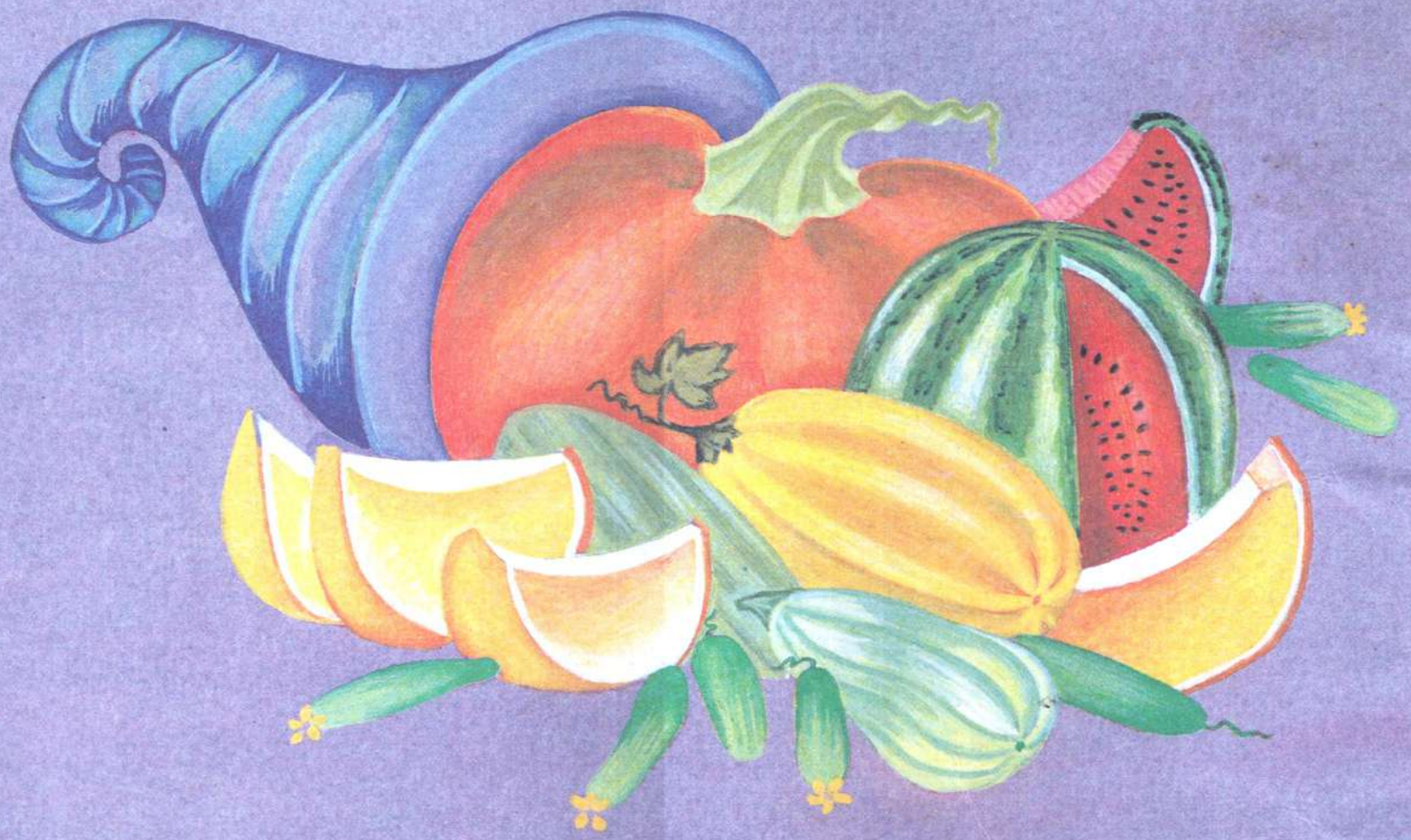
The night retreats before the dawn, and there is

a weapon against darkness—light. It began to burn far to the North. And then Brother Cucumber boldly crossed the border to become neighbors with the polar bear.

The polar night lasts half the year, and for half the year it is dark outside his house. But all one has to do is flip the switch, and it is as if the sun came up. The greenhouse is filled with light from bright electric bulbs.

Brother Cucumber's present home has everything he could wish for: running water, electricity, and steam heat. Brother Cucumber has neighbors: onions, salad, spinach, and tomatoes. Let the snow fall, let the snowstorm rage, in the greenhouse it is spring.

Does that mean the war which has gone on for centuries is over? No. The war with frost will never end. But man's stubbornness and search for new ideas will never end either.



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